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ABSTRACT

Cooperative planning, based upon a decade of reentry programs for adults, culminated in the establishment of a public service known as the Adult Resource Center at the University of Akron (Ohio). Located in a renovated building between the campus and the downtown community, the Adult Resource Center serves as a liaison with social service agencies, businesses, and other educational units in a 10-county area. The Center provides guidance to adults in deciding if, when, or where they want to continue to learn. The center serves 700 persons per month, providing individual and group career/life planning services from learning consultants--peer counselors who have made changes in their own lives and recognize the value of continuing to learn. The Center also provides programs of career alternatives for educators, faculty development for new learners, academic advisement, outplacement services, retirement planning, and management development. Much of the success of the Center is based on a continuing evaluation process to determine the needs of adults and the effectiveness of the service. Future directions of this human resource development service will be determined by many factors, such as educational budgets, changes in the work place, increased needs for marketing strategies of admissions personnel in postsecondary institutions, improved technology which may make the service available in the home or work place, and increased needs of professionals and retired persons. (Author/KC)

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APGA 1982 SESSION NO. 654: ADULT RESOURCE CENTER - A COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY PROJECT

KATHRYN A. VEGSO

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Population shifts, changing work force, new expectations of employees, changing school enrollment patterns, documented need for adults to feel productive over an extended life span, and the impact of telecommunications coupled with problems of inflation, energy, and the family, have one common thread for all human beings . . . the need to know. Today, the accumulated knowledge doubles every three to five years; therefore, adults and out-of-school youth must continue to learn or choose to fall behind in their productive interests. Consistent to each adult life stage is adjustment to new stresses and career redirection.

With a futuristic view toward the needs of prospective adult learners, the University of Akron established, September 1978, the Adult Resource Center. This brokerage service provides educational and occupational information, guidance and referral to prospective adult learners in a ten-county area. The service does not recruit students for specific learning opportunities; rather, it brokers impartial information regarding the variety of learning opportunities in the ten-county area. Such learning includes proprietary schools, adult vocational education, colleges, universities, and special programs in libraries and social service agencies. In addition, the service provides information about extension courses and external degrees. The concept is built upon the belief that the most important person in the adult learning process is the individual learner who needs assistance before deciding if, when, or where to continue to learn. This intervention service is designed to meet the obstacles to further learning so often identified from one's self, the educational system and the society at large.

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In 1981, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities cited the University of Akron as a Mitau Finalist for the development of the Adult Resource Center as one of the most successfully implemented and innovative programs in higher education. Materials developed have also received national citations and are made available on a cost-effective basis to other educators. Two proclamations from the Mayor of Akron recognize the Adult Resource Center for its public service at a time when the citizens of northeastern Ohio face an increasing rate of unemployment.

The Adult Resource Center is based upon the career development theory which stresses a lifelong series of career decisions made at various transition points. Its programs reflect the recognition that the adult learner possesses a wealth of experiences, is problem-centered rather than subject-oriented, and that both the choice and success of continuing to learn is related to the learner's hopes and relationships to the family, the community, and often the work place.

Recognizing that by continuing to learn one may improve the quality of life over the life span, the Adult Resource Center is designed to provide adult learning services through the following objectives:

- Teach a decision-making process to assist persons in making life choices
- Teach process skills through which an individual can identify transferable skills
- Teach skills necessary for career and life transitions
- Reach out to populations which are not taking advantage of learning opportunities in this community

- Plan specific short-term learning experiences aimed toward target groups
- Develop media, materials and programs which extend to where the learner works or lives
- Involve potential learners in the planning process
- Involve persons who have made life transitions in the service delivery
- Serve an advocate role to the adult entering the process of continuing to learn
- Develop alliances with the community's educational, business, governmental, religious, recreational and social service units
- Maintain communication with the University's departmental and student services' units
- Help organizations improve their effectiveness by enhancing the performance and productivity of their employees who participate in career/life planning activities

The philosophy of the service is based upon new definitions for work and education. Career, or work, is defined as that personal industry through a lifetime which may or may not provide a specific monetary return. Education is defined as those total life experiences through which an individual satisfies the need to know and develops new productive skills. To identify the interrelations between work and education at various adult life stages, the Center provides opportunities through individual appointments and workshops which focus upon helping persons plan ways to improve the quality of their lives. Services are delivered by Learning Consultants, peer counselors who

have experienced career/life changes and recognize the value of continuing to learn during a time of rapid change.

Through individual appointments with Learning Consultants and group activities, held both on and off campus, adults learn the decision-making skills of career/life planning, job finding, and retirement planning. This is not a placement service; however, a person is taught the skills to take responsibility for his/her own career redirection. No charge is made for the individual appointments; workshops are self-supporting; and contracts are established for off-campus services.

Based upon a decade of providing life planning workshops to adults of this community, first reentry women and later men and women, the Adult Resource Center was designed to meet those needs expressed on thousands of evaluation forms. Its design was developed in collaboration with representation from community, business, governmental, social service, and other educational units. Even the acronym ARC is symbolic of the linkage between this University and its community. Housed in a renovated train station and geographically located between the University campus and the center of the city, this public service was established with hard dollars. Community Sites (currently in the county library system and the Women's Network) and specialized off-campus services are an evidence of this linkage. This service to adults represents a new network of the community's educational services (ten-county area) and a new approach to adults needing career information and life planning skills to make role changes.

In the early seventies, during the development of the life planning workshops, a review of literature gave sparse supportive data for this kind

of program development. The writings of Peter Drucker, economist, and Roger L. Gould, M.D., plus the speeches of Harold Hodgkinson and Patricia Cross, encouraged educators to pay attention to the life span needs of prospective adult learners. The fields of personnel and training also provided a stimulus to educators about the training needs of adults. Next came federal legislation (Title IV of the Education Amendments Act of 1976) known as the Lifelong Learning Project which assured the adult population of access to educational information, guidance and referral.

Significant is the study conducted by the College Entrance Examination Board and Policy Studies in Education (division of the Academy for Educational Development) under contract with the National Institute of Education. This project, funded by the Exxon Education Foundation, was reported first by the Future Directions for a Learning Society program of the College Board (1978). A more complete interpretation of that study and its impact is now available in monograph form, Americans in Transition, Aslanian and Brickell, College Board, New York, 1980. This study identified the career transition needs and found that forty million Americans were undergoing or anticipating career change. Sixty percent of those adults planned to seek additional education in order to gain credentials for entering into new fields or to promote advancement into present fields. Most of them indicated that they did not know of any career/life planning services in their communities. Coexisting evidence from the Department of Labor Statistics showed that one-fourth of the current thirty thousand job classifications listed in the mid-seventies would be obsolete by the beginning of the next decade.

As a result of this legislation and basic data, the National Center for Educational Brokering was established. Under the direction of Francis U. Macy, this network continues to provide direction in cooperation with the National Manpower Institute. Issues of the Bulletin provide guidelines in the establishment and operation of brokerage services. A Network Directory lists over five hundred brokerage-type services for prospective adult learners.

Central to the philosophy of working with adults in career/life planning is knowledge about the self-concept and the limitations adults place upon themselves due to stereotypical thinking. Based upon the work of Loevinger and Schlossberg, the materials developed in the Adult Resource Center are planned to remove those limitations and help individuals use their untapped resources. Using the career choice data of Holland and Strong, coupled with knowledge of adult social roles, as stated by Havighurst, the process and use of materials is supported by the following specific research:

"Effects of Personal Growth Groups on the Self-Concept and Decision-Making Ability of Normal Adults," CE Franklin-Panek, Psychology, Vol. 15, No. 3, August 1978

"The Older Than Twenty-Five, Undergraduate Students' Awareness, Utilization and Satisfaction with University Student Services," 1976 Doctoral Dissertation, Shirley Mitchell (Unpublished)

"Lifespan Planning Programs: A Test of Tiedeman and O'Hara's Theory and an Evaluation Examination," 1980 Doctoral Dissertation, John M. Malinky (Unpublished)

"Life Planning . . . First Step to Career Planning," Malinky, Vegso, Alleman and Cochran (Accepted for publication, Spring 1982 Journal), National Association for Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors

"A Comparative Study of the Learning Styles and Other Related Factors of the Traditional and Nontraditional Students at The University of Akron," Doctoral Dissertation in progress, Isabel Rush

"The Lifespan Planning Program: University of Akron," 1978, Shirley Terrass (Unpublished paper)

"Career Indecision in Adult Women: A Comparative and Descriptive Study," Slaney, Stafford and Russell, Journal of Vocational Behavior, 19, 335-345 (1981)

Demand for these services increased and ARC currently serves approximately seven hundred persons per month through individual appointments, workshops and outreach activities. A profile of the clients shows that with regard to educational attainment, one-third have completed only high school while another third are college graduates. Family income data show that 52 percent earn less that $15,000 per year. Currently, one-third of the clients are unemployed and there is evidence that the educational level is the 'socio economic sorter' as stated by Dr. Patricia Cross. The evolution of a decade of career/life planning experiences at this University shows that the number of men seeking career/life planning has increased from five percent to over thirty percent of those seeking services.

Using a rating chart of four levels of satisfaction, 75 percent of the clients listed the services of the Adult Resource Center in the highest level, "Very Helpful." A continual evaluation process follows each interview and workshop. In addition, telephone surveys are conducted to determine behavioral changes as a result of this intervention service. The data is used to develop new objectives each year reflecting expressed needs of adults.

Prospective adult learners are encouraged to use library resources. An on-site browsing library contains such references as government publications, national and local directories of services, and selected career/life planning publications including those of Bolles, Jackson, Lathrop and Billhartz. Catalyst materials are among these resources, too. Upon request, a temporary library permit is issued to use the University library resources. It is recommended that each Community Site would need to expend a minimum of $300 for a browsing site.

In addition, there is an on-site reference library for learning consultants. Included here are the journals and newsletters of APGA, AAHE, ASPA, ASTD, NAWDAC among selected others. Listed at the end of this paper is the Bibliography for Training Learning Consultants which is revised periodically.

Materials developed in the Adult Resource Center and in current use are as follows:

Lifespan Planning folio, Mitchell, Vegso

Puzzling Your Career folio, Brandel I, and S. Brandel

Resume Writing folio, Adult Resource Center Staff

Come Alive! Career and Life Planning Workbook, Russell, Vegso

Come Alive - Six, half-hour national award-winning videotapes, 1981, prepared for Public Service Television, The University of Akron Television Production Center

Individual client guides developed as handouts:

- Bibliography
- Financial Aid for Education
- Part-time Employment
- Methods of Documentation for Volunteer Experiences
- Choosing a Training or Educational Institution

Other training materials developed by ARC:

- Characteristics of Adult Life Stages
- Manual of Training and Educational Sites for a Ten-County Area
- "Lifespan Planning - Project Discovery," 16 MM. film of a simulated program presented regarding reentry women, WKYC (NBC, 1974)

These materials are now used nation-wide due to their availability at moderate costs from the Adult Resource Center.

Adaptations to the process of life planning, career choice, and job-finding skills have been developed by modifying the materials and presenting them in the following programs:

Career Alternatives for Teachers

Career Changes from Education to Business

Faculty Development for New Learners

Career Redirection in Adult Life Stages

Adjusting to New Stresses in Adulthood

Outplacement Services

Retirement Planning

Management Development

Identification of Transferable Skills

The Career/Life Planning Process for Training Librarians

Reentry Programs for Women

Career/Life Planning: A New Learner Service

Corporations and the Dual Career Family

Lifespan Planning as an Academic Advisement Tool

Career/Life Planning by Television

Career/Life Planning for Inner-City and Rural Youth

Career/Life Planning for Parents of Gifted Students

Future directions of his human resource development service will be determined by several factors:

First, declining dollars for education may encourage the use of this cost-effective method and its self-help materials for student personnel services for adults and youth.

Second, increased need for new marketing strategies for admissions personnel in post-secondary institutions.

Third, changes in the work places of the service delivery area e.g. plant closing, may allow for the development of on-site services contracted with the company's management or union.

Fourth, state and federal revenue patterns will shift dollars from one source to another and may affect current CETA-funded projects

which make these services available to inner-city and rural youth in poverty areas and to displaced homemakers.

Fifth, improved technology and access to its sources may make possible delivery of these career/life planning services in the home, the work place, the local library, and other community service sites. Managers will then be needed to organize the materials, respond to the feedback, and design new software as evidence of changing needs.

Sixth, increased need to help professionals take more responsibility for their own personal and professional growth.

Seventh, increased need to train educators in post-secondary institutions to more effectively work with the adult learners.

Eighth, more effective retirement planning processes which allow for career redirection in the later years of life.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, speaking in Akron, Ohio, 1978, stated that "Organizations become sluggish when people concentrate on protecting what they have rather than producing what they can." There is no place for sluggishness in a university/community brokerage service!

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